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SUBJECT: TBILISI ELECTIONS UPDATE, 12/5/2007

Campaigns Continue

¶1. (U) Presidential candidate Mikheil Saakashvili's representatives presented the Central Election Commission (CEC) with 140,000 supporters, signatures December 4, well over the 50,000 required to register a candidate. (The deadline for submission of signatures is December 6 at 1800.)

In a December 4 address to students at Tbilisi State University, Saakashvili claimed the de facto South Ossetian government in Tskhinvali is a "loose tooth ready for removal." Saakashvili went on to say if he won the election, the Georgia-Ossetian conflict would be resolved in a few months. The Equality Institute, an anti-government NGO, sponsored a rally of less than 100 people during Saakashvili's speech to protest the exclusion of students not "favorable" to Saakashvili from the meeting. The Equality Institute also claimed two students were kidnapped by officers of the Constitutional Security Department of the Interior Ministry before the rally and abandoned in a rural area to prevent them from participating.

Saakashvili a Target of Complaints

¶2. (U) Labor Party candidate Shalva Natelashvili called on his supporters to attend a protest rally in Rose Revolution Square in Tbilisi on December 5. The Labor Party also asked the CEC to deny Saakashvili's registration as a candidate based on "illegal campaigning," including the use of administrative resources for his campaign (reftel).

¶3. (U) On December 3, a rally organized by Batumi University students to demand the reopening of Imedi TV was broken up by police. The Interior Ministry said four opposition activists were arrested after attempting to block traffic during the rally. Republican Party leader Tina Khidasheli claimed the action by police was another effort by the government to "terrorize" opponents. Alexander Lomaia, Secretary of the National Security Council, called on all candidates to agree not to hinder the campaigns of other candidates. Saakashvili's supporters claim his campaigning has been hindered by protests and other "provocations" at his public appearances.

¶4. (U) The Georgian Young Lawyers Association (GYLA) sent a letter to the Central Election Commission (CEC) on December 4, saying Tbilisi mayor Gigi Ugulava and Minister for Refugees and Accommodations Koba Subeliani violated the election code by participating in Saakashvili's campaign. Ugulava and Subeliani attended a November 26 meeting with Saakashvili and a group of Abkhaz internally displaced persons (IDPs) where Saakashvili asked the two government

employees to hand over state-owned property to the IDP's who occupy it. GYLA asked the CEC to fine Ugulava and Subeliani GEL 2000 for participating in the election campaign at the same time as performing their duties. CEC said it would consider the appeal.

Russians Not Invited to Observe Elections

¶5. (U) Georgia will not invite Russian Election observers to monitor the January 5 elections, Acting President Nino Burjanadze told a Russian newspaper December 4. She said Russian observers might not be objective. She was open to participation from CIS member states which have "friendly" relations with Georgia.

Latest Developments in Okruashvili Case

¶6. (U) A German court found no grounds to block the extradition of Georgian opposition leader Irakli Okruashvili on December 4. The German authorities have decided that Okruashvili should remain in custody, as requested by the GOG, while he awaits a final decision on his extradition. Okruashvili's attorney, Eka Beselia, and his wife, Irina Gordeladze, have visited him in jail.

Patarkatsishvili: Collecting Signatures

¶7. (U) Presidential candidate Badri Patarkatsishvili will open his campaign on December 6 or 7 following submission of the required 50,000 signatures to the CEC. Giorgi Zhvania,

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brother of deceased PM Zurab Zhvania, announced that Patarkatsishvili's campaign has already collected 60,000 signatures.

Step Toward Reopening Imedi

¶8. Pursuant to Acting President Burjanadze's order, the prosecutor general asked a Tbilisi court to unfreeze Imedi's assets. The court is expected to rule on the request within 24 hours. Imedi's manager said that Imedi technicians would then enter the television station's studio and determine how long it will take the station to return to the air.

TEFFT